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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BREAKS GROUND ON TWO SHELTERS FOR
TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

REF: MANILA 788

¶1. Summary. Ambassador joined NGO and government leaders in a July 11 groundbreaking ceremony for a new shelter for victims of trafficking in persons (TIP) at Manila's North Harbor, the largest port in the Philippines. The shelter will replace an earlier one built in 2001, and will be able to accommodate a larger number of intercepted TIP victims at the port. The Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) will construct the facility, while NGO Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF), with assistance from the U.S. Government, will oversee its operations when construction is completed. The PPA announced its plans to build three additional shelters at "hot spot" ports over the next year -- Zamboanga, Iloilo and Surigao. The event at Manila's North Harbor came just two months following the groundbreaking for a VFF halfway house at Manila's International Airport. End Summary.

Larger Shelter to be Built at Manila's Port

¶2. On July 11, exactly six years after the opening of VFF's first halfway house for trafficking victims, Ambassador, VFF Executive Director Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, and PPA General Manager Oscar Sevilla celebrated PPA's plans to construct a new, larger shelter at Manila's North Harbor Port within the next six months. Though the initial construction was already underway, the three joined other NGO and government leaders to bury a commemorative capsule within the building's foundations. The capsule contained copies of the halfway house agreements between the PPA and VFF, the architectural plans for the new facility, and the day's newspaper to mark the date of the ceremony. Media attendance at the event was extensive, leading to prominent articles in major daily newspapers and on TV news featuring the Ambassador's remarks and detailing U.S. assistance in anti-TIP efforts in the Philippines.

¶3. The partnership between VFF and the PPA dates back to 1999 when the PPA agreed to construct VFF's first halfway house for victims and potential victims of trafficking at North Harbor. After two years of discussions, VFF and PPA opened the doors of the "Bahay Silungan sa Daungan" (Port Halfway House) on July 11, 2001. Since opening the shelter's doors, the staff of VFF North Harbor Halfway House has rescued more than 2,400 actual and potential TIP victims. They have trained more than 2,300 port employees, including law enforcement officers, cargo handlers, and shipping operators, on how to identify and intercept victims and traffickers aboard vessels. Having outgrown the original space, the new

two-story shelter will be able to accommodate approximately 30 victims at any given time and will house a separate conference room for VFF training at the port.

¶4. Following the successful partnership at the North Harbor, the PPA has also built halfway houses at the ports of Davao, Batangas, and Sorsogon. The four halfway houses have become centers for information and advocacy against TIP, as well as places of sanctuary for thousands of victims intercepted each year.

¶5. At the July 11 ceremony, PPA General Manager Sevilla announced the PPA's plans to build three new shelters within the next year. In coordination with VFF, PPA selected three "hot spots" in the Visayas and Mindanao where traffickers are suspected of operating -- Zamboanga, Iloilo and Surigao. The shelter in Zamboanga will target passengers traveling to and from the southernmost islands of Jolo and Tawi-Tawi, as well as the neighboring countries of Malaysia and Indonesia. The shelters in Surigao and Iloilo will address the routes from the Visayas to metro-Manila via land and sea.

From Seaport to Airport

¶6. While Philippine anti-TIP efforts at seaports have long been regarded as an international best practice (and highlighted in the 2005 TIP Report as such), government and NGO focus is now being placed on Manila's airport as a key transit point for trafficking victims, especially those trafficked to international destinations.

¶7. On May 7, Ambassador, VFF Executive Director Oebanda, and

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Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA) General Manager Alfonso Cusi unveiled the plans for a halfway house at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), the first of its kind in the Philippines. Airport Manager Cusi and VFF Oebanda's relationship extends back to the agreement to build the first halfway house at Manila's North Harbor Port, when Cusi was then the Port's General Manager. Using the PPA-VFF partnership as a model, Cusi's MIAA is absorbing all construction costs for the halfway house, while VFF will manage the daily operations of the shelter when completed. The airport halfway house is expected to be fully operational in late 2007 or early 2008. It will augment MIAA's ongoing law enforcement efforts through the Airport's Anti-TIP Task Force (reftel) by providing support services to victims and potential victims intercepted by the Task Force.

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